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wishes and compliments, and believe me with best respects

Dear Sir, your's

Sincerely,

HUGH BOYD.

5th March, (for I was obliged to go out of town.)

To the Proprietors of the Belfast Magazine.

IN the present ostentatious and expensive style of publication, nothing can be more useful, and ought to be more popular, than to have a *cheap conveyance of valuable truths*, such as your Magazine professes to be; a means of communicating information, which, at present, is, as it were, *hoarded*; not for the benefit of those who are willing, but only of those who are able to purchase costly books. The press is really secluded from the people by the high price of the manufacture. The ancient manuscript was perhaps as widely circulated, and as generally read as the modern publication. The other arts have indeed combined to adorn the art of printing, but the fatal effect of all these borrowed embellishments, is, to make the art itself, lose sight of its great object, and primary purpose, the diffusion of knowledge and the wide circulation of truth. That circulation grows more partial and confined, when authors are so drest up by milliner printers, as to be fascinated almost as much with the exterior ornament, as with the intrinsic worth of their performances. In pursuance of the idea of cheapening the commodity for the use of the vulgar as they are called, I request the insertion, in your next Magazine, of an extract from Malcolm Laing's History of Scotland, which gives an account of the origin, institutions and character of the INDEPENDENTS, a conspicuous sect and distinguished party. We are to judge whether this

religious party be extinct *at present* in the laity as well as the clergy, or whether the laity be still of their religious persuasion, and the clergy, as is the tendency of human nature, attached to an ecclesiastical government, in its various forms of presbyteries, associations northern and southern, or provincial synods, a church government verging every day more and more, from causes I mean not at present to investigate, into the form, the nature, the principles, and the practice of an establishment or alliance of church and state. R.

INDEPENDENTS.

EACH sect in its turn has explored the gospels, in quest of the primitive form of the christian church. The puritans discovered that bishops and presbyters, overseers and elders, were originally equal, and the terms interchangeable, till the first was appropriated to the president of a congregation or synod, elevated in due course of ecclesiastical usurpation, above his co-presbyters. But as each sect beholds its opinions faithfully reflected in the mirror of the gospels, a bolder class of enthusiasts, more impatient of intolerance, had found that before the institution of a regular presbytery, the congregations themselves were independent and equal. The apostolical churches planted in Jerusalem, Corinth and Ephesus, were regulated by pastors freely chosen; instructed occasionally by lay-prophets; and united only by the ties of charity and a common faith. According to this early, evangelical model, they rejected the indelible character of an established and distinct order of priesthood; placed the choice and admission of pastors in the congregation at large; indulged the indiscriminate exercise of preaching; and permitted an unrestrained secession whenever their numbers or their dissections required

a separate church *. Their defection from the established church, escaped not the severe vigilance of Elizabeth's ministers. But their abhorrence of its rigid discipline, was increased by the sufferings and execution of their clergy †; and the most opulent fled to Holland, the only secure asylum from the persecution of the age. Their infant church was established there by the toleration of the magistrates; but it was abandoned by Brown, their inconstant leader, and almost dismembered by a fruitful principle of division and decay. It was restored by Robinson, a temperate and learned divine, who reclaimed the sect from the sullen intolerance contracted under its former persecution; renewed its communion with the reformed churches; retrenched or appropriated the gift of prophecy to a chosen few; and abolished the name of Brownists; a name justly odious from the defection of their founder; whom the hopes of ecclesiastical preferment had attracted to England. Under the more honourable designation of independents, a part of the sect was restored to England in the reign of James, and continued many years alternately to endure the severity of the laws, and to elude the jealous observation of the prelates. The remainder of the congregation was diminished by the death of the older members, and in danger of being extinguished by the intermarriages of their children into Dutch families. A select portion embarked for America, to perpetuate their declining society in a dis-

tant land. They established themselves at New Plymouth, the first settlement in the province of Massachusetts, to which the puritans were soon driven by persecution, and attracted by civil and religious freedom. They were visited by the younger Vane, who became a secret proselyte, and was elected governor of Massachusetts; but the puritans, after his departure, revived the persecution from which they had fled themselves. Rhode Island, Connecticut, and Hampshire, were peopled by the fugitives, who preserved in their new settlements the spirit of toleration that distinguished their sect. On the meeting of the long parliament, when their brethren in London, after subsisting secretly for twenty years, were revealed to public view, some of their choice preachers returned to England with new hopes of success, and with a fixed antipathy to the established church*.

Their progress was rapid, as their tenets were equally adapted to gratify the most enlightened, and the most enthusiastic minds. With them the visible church was neither an abstract idea, nor an empty name. Each congregation was a separate church; each church was erected on a separate rock, and the members first engaged by a solemn covenant, with united hands, to walk together in the paths, and to observe the ordinances of religion hitherto manifested, or hereafter to be revealed. They then proceeded to appoint a pastor and elders, by a general suffrage, and the imposition of their own hands. To him their choice was sufficient ordination; to them alone he was pastor; to other congregations a mere layman; and this lax association constituted a church of divine in-

* Robinson's *Apologia Brownistarum*.

† Copping and Thacker were put to death in 1583, Barrow and Greenwood in 1592. What is singular and perhaps unexampled, the two former were executed for circulating a publication for which Brown the author was pardoned, released from prison, and afterwards preferred. Neal's Hist. Purit. i. 375—89. 558.

* Neal's Hist. of New England. Hist. of the Puritans, ii. 47. 128. Hutchison's Hist. of Massachusetts. Robertson's Hist. of America.

stitution, independent on other churches, except for their advice, or excluded merely from their communion, if obstinate in its errors.—Marriage was resigned to the magistrate as a civil contract; the tithes, vestments, and ceremonies of the Mosaic law were alike rejected; and their pastor, whose sacerdotal character commenced, and expired with his office, subsisted on the voluntary contributions of his flock. The extent of a congregation was limited to the numbers that might meet conveniently in the same place. But as two or three might assemble together, seven were esteemed sufficient to complete a church; and as each member might separeate, if dissatisfied with the others, the principle was not more fertile in divisions, than productive of new seminaries for this prolific sect. As theirs was a voluntary association of saints, a single member might oppose the admission of a proselyte, till convinced of his regeneration; but this contracted regulation superseded the more intolerant, and fallible use of confessions and creeds; and when the scriptures were the indiscriminate standard of faith, belief in Christ the sole test of orthodoxy, hard indeed was the lot of that outcast with whom none would associate, and whom no congregation was disposed to receive. In the churches of Rome and England, the christian community was an hierarchy ascending like the sacred gradations in heaven. In the presbyterian church, it was a Spartan commonwealth, where the priests were saints and alone equal, the people sinners and alone degenerate. According to the independent system, the christian community, parcelled out into separate churches, united by slender yet comprehensive ties, was a federal republic where each member held an active situa-

tion, and where every speculative tenet found a secure retreat*.

Enthusiasm was congenial to a sect, whose rapturous devotion was neither assuaged by the stated observance of ceremonies, nor restrained by ordinances, confessions, or creeds. But the most distinguished attribute, and in that age the reproach of their sect, was religious toleration.† Without assuming to themselves any temporal authority, they denied the right of the civil magistrate to interpose in the religious and speculative opinions of mankind. Satisfied with the spiritual powers of admonition and excommunication, of which the one was more freely, and the other more sparingly and temperately administered, they were the first christians who adopted the principles of toleration in adversity, and maintained them during the prosperity of their sect. "Their mind," says a philosophical historian, "set afloat in the wide sea of inspiration, could confine itself within no certain limits; and the same variations in which an enthusiast indulged himself, he was apt, by a natural train of thinking, to permit in others‡. It is difficult to resist a solution so truly ingenious. But its authority is impaired by an obvious consideration, that amidst the revolutions and incessant fluctuations of religion, no system has yet inspired that extreme zeal, of

* Neal's Hist. of Puritans, ii. 163. Hist. of New England, 62. 74. 126—71. Baillie's Dissuasive from the errors of the times.

† Toleration is the incessant reproach, re-echoed by Baillie, Rutherford, Edwards, and every writer against the independents. The presbyterian, having been once a persecuted, became naturally a persecuting religion on its triumph; a general principle, from which the independents form a singular and honourable exception.

‡ Hume's Hist.

which mild and tolerating sentiments are the natural result. A better reason is contained in the peculiar form of their ecclesiastical institution. They had searched their scriptures for the earliest model of the primitive church; but from the loose texture, and imperfect union of independent congregations, persecution was impracticable. When expelled from one congregation, the offender might obtain easy access to another, or establish a separate church of his own. The civil authority could neither be appropriated, nor lent occasionally to their different churches; and when the necessity of toleration was once acknowledged, its benefits were soon recommended by an influx of proselytes from every persecuted, or afflicted sect. The antinomian, who believed that the truly elect, however criminal their actions, were incapable of sin; the anabaptist, whose inoffensive doctrine, that baptism should be practised by immersion on adults susceptible of a religious vow and a rational obligation, was odious from the former excesses of his sect on the continent; escaped into their churches, and from this indulgent liberty which the conscience enjoyed, their sudden rise and prosperity may be derived. Their numbers were as yet inconsiderable; in London they were not supposed to exceed a thousand; but these were mostly persons of rank, or eminence, distinguished in parliament, in the assembly of divines, and in the committees for the city and associated counties. Contrary to the progress of other sects, the independent system was first addressed, and apparently recommended by its tolerating principles, to the higher orders of social life. It was in the progressive state of the sect, when in danger from the persecuting spirit of the presbyterians, that it descended to the lower classes of

the community, where other sectaries begin their career. There, perhaps, it contracted a deeper tinge of enthusiasm. In some congregations, it imbibed from the anabaptists, those religious doctrines which are most adverse and irreconcilable to civil society; the community of goods and the approaching reign of the saints on earth. Such excessive fanaticism was peculiar to a few, nor were the doctrines of their clergy in general, which were strictly calvinistical, different, except in ecclesiastical government, from those of the reformed church. Their learning was distinguished in the assembly of divines; and as their moderation is still conspicuous in its debates, is difficult to conceive how the same men should also exceed the presbyterians in the opposite extreme of enthusiastic zeal. But the democratical spirit of its ecclesiastical policy was imbibed by its adherents, and the republican principles that began to predominate in the state, were abetted by religion*.

A sect that disavowed the obligation of tithes, rejected a consecrated and distinct priesthood, and restored mankind to their religious liberties, was obnoxious to every established church. From the share of its political adherents in the destruction of monarchy, it was equally odious to almost every historian. Its genius and institutions have therefore deserved a more ample explanation; but the philosopher, whose researches extend beyond the province of history, endeavours to explore its probable effects on society, had it been universally adopted and permitted to subsist. On this question, two of the most illustrious philosophers of the age have differed†. From the

* Baillie's *Dissuasive*. Clarend. v. 115

† Hume's *Hist.* iv. 30. Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, iii. 198.

interested diligence and zeal of the clergy, to conciliate adherents by every novelty, and to inspire a mutual abhorrence in very conventicle, the one concludes that their subsistence, instead of depending, as in other liberal professions, on a gratuitous recompence derived from their votaries, must be secured by public salaries, and a fixed establishment; that their interests may be reconciled with the peace of society; their indolence bribed, and their zeal disarmed. From the same principles the other maintains, that the active or interested zeal of religious teachers, becomes dangerous or troublesome only then, when the state is attached to one, or divided into two or three extensive sects, and the clergy, acting in concert, are actuated by mutual subordination and discipline. Were the number increased; were society itself subdivided into some hundred, or some thousand sects, the teachers of each little congregation, surrounded by adversaries far more numerous and powerful than their adherents, would be compelled to adopt that mutual respect, and to cultivate those virtues of moderation and of candour, which are unknown to religions whose tenets are countenanced or enforced by the civil magistrate, and revered by the multitude; and whose clergy perceive none around them, but an obsequious crowd of followers, disciples, dependents, and friends.—From the mutual concessions necessary to be made by each diminutive sect, the greater part would be reduced in time to a pure and rational worship, free from imposture, superstition, or fanaticism, such as the wise have ever wished to see established, but positive institutions, still subservient to popular delusion, have ever counteracted. The truth of this philosophical doctrine, is confirmed by a general historical observation,

that enthusiasm is invariably the prevailing vice of a rising sect, superstition the disease of an established degenerate church. Where a new system respecting our future welfare, has engrossed the understanding, the imagination and the passions expand upon the subject; the three most powerful principles of the human frame are stretched by mutual reaction to their utmost; and are productive of that sublime and contagious frenzy which maddens from resistance, and for some generations may last undiminished. When the novelty ceases, the enthusiasm decays. It declines into superstition, where religion is fixed and preserved by rites, prohibitions, ceremonies; sanctimonious observances on which the mind may fasten when its fervour has abated; or subsides into a placid and calm indifférence, which constitutes the happiest state of enlightened society*. By a singular felicity, the speculative truths of philosophy have been verified throughout that extensive continent, to which the independents originally fled for refuge. From the western shores of the Atlantic, to the banks of the Ohio, the citizen

*The ferocious and irresistible enthusiasm of the Jews, on their irruption from the desert, disappeared before the captivity, and has degenerated into a sordid superstition, fixed and perpetuated by exclusive rites, and by the prohibition of whatever is common or indifferent to the rest of mankind. The Mahometans emerged from the same deserts. Their victorious fanaticism has also degenerated into the superstitious performance of ablutions, fasts, and the stated returns and attitudes of prayer. The milder zeal of the first christians was lost in the ceremonious devotion of a corrupt church. In proportion as the reformers chose to recede from its pagantry, their institutions rose to an enthusiastic fury, or relapsed into a bigoted attachment to the functions, vestments, or rank of the priesthood, and the ceremonies, prayers, and confessions of the ritual.

chooses his own altar; the sect provides for its own pastor; and from independent congregations, connected by no discipline, nor cherished by the partial support of the state, an harmonious moderation is the universal result.

To the Proprietors of the Belfast Magazine.

ON RICE AS AN ARTICLE OF FOOD
FOR THE POOR.

A considerable fears have been entertained of a scarcity of provisions this year; I am induced to recommend to benevolent persons who have the management of soup shops, &c. to prepare rice-meat as a palatable and wholesome article of food for the poor. It is made by putting any quantity, say one pound of rice into four quarts of boiling water; set it on a slow fire to stew, until all the water is absorbed. When it is cold, it will be solid, and may be warmed with a little milk and treacle; or salt and a small slice of bacon; or with onions and a little pepper; or with red or white herrings. Perhaps a considerable saving could be made in the preparation of this article of food, if it were baked in a baker's oven, after the bread had been taken out. In Liverpool rice-meat has been distributed to the poor with advantage; in some instances the demand for it has been so great, that a person who has brought a sixpenny ticket for the purchase of it, could only obtain one quart, or one pennyworth after waiting a considerable time. As many of the poor live at a considerable distance from the rice houses, it has been proposed to have the rice-meat sent round, and measured out to them, as the country women sell milk.

In Liverpool there are also two soup shops erected; one at the north,

and the other at the south end of the town. In each of the houses there is a room for the preparation of food which is cooked by steam; and the whole does not require more coals than a common parlour fire. Each house can make 400 gallons of soup twice a day without inconvenience.

The poor seldom prize food which they get gratuitously; and giving them money frequently does more harm than good. Yet as every poor family know their own wants better than another can be supposed to do, the Strangers' friend society*, intend to open a shop in Liverpool, where food of every kind will be sold for *ready money only* at a small profit; and it has been recommended to those who would give a poor person money at their doors, to give them tickets to the soup, rice, coal, or other shops, as the tickets could not readily pass at the dram shops.

Y.

To the Proprietors of the Belfast Magazine.

DURING a late tour in England, frequently mentioned your valuable magazine to such of my acquaintance as were likely to promote its circulation; but was surprised to find that many of them had never heard of it, and others who had, gave as a reason for not taking it, the difficulty of procuring it sufficiently early. To these latter, I suggested the post office as a likely medium for receiving it early, but was told that it could not be sent thereby *gratis*. In the coffee-rooms, reading-rooms, and news rooms, a number of magazines are admitted, but I did not perceive yours in one

* The word *stranger* as understood by the strangers' friend society, signifies any person who is not entitled to parish relief.